

Setting the Direction Framework Government of Alberta Response

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SETTING THE DIRECTION



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Introduction

At the request of school jurisdictions, Alberta Education conducted a comprehensive review of school jurisdictional practices with respect to students with severe disabilities in the fall of 2007. Based on the review of file documentation provided by school jurisdictions, only 56% of the files met Alberta Education's policy requirements. Across the province, inconsistencies were found with the application of Alberta Education's special education coding criteria and how supports and services were being provided to students.

The review confirmed the need for a broader examination of how the education system can best meet the educational needs of students with disabilities and those who are gifted and talented. *Setting the Direction* for Special Education in Alberta was launched in early 2008 with a mandate to create a new framework for special education in grades 1 to 12. From the consultations with more than 6,000 Albertans, it became clear that children in early learning programs and students who were transitioning out of the school system would also be impacted by a new framework for special education. Therefore, the proposed framework includes directions for building an inclusive education system that meets the needs of all students.

At the Minister's Forum in June 2009, the proposed framework was officially presented to the Minister of Education by steering committee chair, Naresh Bhardwaj, MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie. The framework recommends that the current special education system be replaced by an inclusive education system supported by effective policy, funding and accountability. Careful consideration has been given to ensuring that the policy directions in the proposed *Setting the Direction Framework* are considered in the context of the *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans* initiative, and will be reflected in any anticipated review of the *School Act*.

This document outlines the Government of Alberta's response to the *Setting the Direction* Steering Committee's proposed vision, mission, principle statements and strategic directions. The Government of Alberta accepts each of the strategic directions and will develop detailed implementation and transition plans for the short, medium and longer term. These plans will be developed in the context of available resources and in consultation with partners and stakeholders. The proposed strategic directions will have significant impacts on the education system, and the Government of Alberta is committed to building an inclusive education system in a collaborative way.

Government Response to Vision, Mission and Principles

Vision:

One inclusive education system¹ where each student is successful.

Mission:

To work with Government of Alberta partners and stakeholders to build an inclusive education system, based on integrity, best practices, and respect for difference.

¹ An inclusive education system is: "a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all students. Inclusive education in Alberta means a value-based approach to accepting responsibility for all students. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice" where such a placement is appropriate, and is undertaken in full consultation with a child's parents/guardians, teachers, school officials, and relevant community service providers. Inclusion and choice must never be considered in a vacuum.



Principles:

Government of Alberta and its partners and stakeholders believe:

- that all students can learn and be successful
- that when stakeholders work together in a collaborative and purposeful way, more is accomplished for students.

Government of Alberta and its partners and stakeholders value:

- an education system that is fair, appropriately resourced, highly accountable and which provides equitable opportunities for all students
- parents as vital members of the learning team² who contribute important expertise and insights
- diversity as a positive and enriching aspect of Alberta's education system
- the learning that happens for everyone when students with disabilities are effectively included in school life.

Government of Alberta and its partners and stakeholders commit to:

- working together for the success of each student in an inclusive education system
- ensuring students and families are welcomed, respected and supported so they can be successful
- ensuring teachers and the school system are supported so they can be successful
- being learner centered in all decisions to help ensure the learner is the priority in any decisions made with respect to that learner's needs.

Government Response to Proposed Strategic Directions

Strategic Direction 1

Create provincial tools and models for interpreting the current Programs of Study so that all students have opportunities for learning and growth based on their strengths.

Government Response

Government will provide tools to help school authorities adapt and utilize the current Programs of Study and learning and teaching resources for students with specialized learning needs within the context of the student's school and community. The development of future Programs of Study will continue to include a focus on accessible and assessable material.

Strategic Direction 2

Gather information at the Ministerial, jurisdictional, school and classroom levels to support all students.

Government Response

Government will continue to collaborate with stakeholders to develop and implement a data collection approach to support student learning and capture student records and information regarding achievement and progress.

² Learning team: means a team that consults and appropriately shares information relevant to an individual student's education and plans, implements and evaluates special education programming and services as required.

**Strategic Direction 3**

Develop accessible learning resources (print and digital) for all students.

Government Response

Government will create and implement provincial standards for ensuring that print and digital learning resources are accessible to help meet the learning needs of all students. Education will continue to work with publishers to achieve this goal.

Strategic Direction 4

Develop practices that demonstrate that parents are respected as important members of the Learning Team.

Government Response

Government will work with stakeholders to create and implement provincial guidelines for educators to increase the involvement of parents in their child's educational program planning. A provincial process will be developed to assist parents and schools in situations requiring resolution or mediation.

Strategic Direction 5

Implement a province-wide expectation that school-based expertise will be in place to support teachers in meeting the needs of students with disabilities and diverse needs within learning environments.

Government Response

Government will work with stakeholders to develop guidelines outlining role descriptions for teachers, learning coaches, educational assistants, administrators, parents and specialized service personnel who are working in an inclusive education system. Government will also work with stakeholders to build capacity to support an inclusive education system. This would include appropriate instruction and training for undergraduate students enrolled in Bachelor of Education programs, and continual professional development opportunities for teachers as their careers progress.

Strategic Direction 6

Develop a set of standards so that instructional excellence in inclusive education practices becomes the norm in all schools.

Government Response

Government will work with stakeholders and partners to develop and implement guidelines for working in an inclusive environment and determine ways to identify and share best practices from highly successful schools that are practicing effective inclusivity.

Strategic Direction 7

Increase access to technologies to support the learning of all students.

Government Response

Government will maximize the power of technology to personalize learning and present material in multiple ways to support the learning of children and youth in an inclusive environment. Government will share relevant learnings derived from innovative projects supported by ministries to enable the provision of supports and services for children and youth and their families (e.g., using videoconferencing to facilitate a meeting of the Learning Team), especially in remote and rural areas.



Strategic Direction 8

Develop a provincial service delivery model for specialized supports and services to address the needs of students in the context of their schools, family and community in a timely and culturally sensitive manner.

Government Response

Government will work with stakeholders to develop a regional collaborative service delivery model to support students in an inclusive education system.

Strategic Direction 9

Develop and support a seamless, Alberta-wide wraparound approach that provides timely access to coordinated supports and services to students and families and schools in the right place at the right time.

Government Response

Government and other organizations, through shared responsibility, will develop and implement protocols for a wraparound approach, including a definable planning process, comprehensive, coordinated supports and services offered through multiple professionals and agencies that support working in a collaborative way.

Strategic Direction 10

Develop and implement a model of support for young children who experience at-risk factors that enable programming and support in the most natural pre-school environment along with a seamless transition into grade 1.

Government Response

Government will work collaboratively with organizations, communities, and families to develop an approach to early learning that takes into account support for pre-school children who are at-risk and provides opportunities for children to begin their early learning experiences in an inclusive setting.

Strategic Direction 11

Develop an accountability system that measures success at meeting the needs of learners with diverse needs.

Government Response

Government will determine system indicators that reflect programs goals for students, identify key instruments for measuring students' outcomes against these indicators and institute a measurement framework that captures results. This evaluation system supports continuous program improvement.

Strategic Direction 12

Consider the funding model presented in the draft framework that supports inclusion of all students.

Government Response

Education will develop a funding model that takes into consideration relevant cost drivers such as geography, accessibility of specialists, school authority size and population, and situations where students with extraordinary high-cost needs may exist. Education will review current grants to school authorities related to the provision of specialized services (e.g., Children and Youth with Complex Needs, Student Health, Regional Educational Consulting Services) to determine the most efficient and effective method of maximizing available resources to assist school authorities in best meeting the needs of all students without funding being driven by student identification. The funding formula will recognize the varying system needs within school authorities and be flexible to these needs.









